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DE RUEHDK #0705/01 0880836
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 290836Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7964
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DAKAR 000705

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STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR GROVER JOSEPH REES' VISIT TO DAKAR

REF: STATE 039149 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY

1. (U) In meetings with the Senegalese government, civil society, NGOs and Catholic and Muslim religious leaders, Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees, Special Representative for Social Issues, discussed U.S. contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS, the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, U.S. problems with the Maputo Plan of Action, and more effective multilateral engagement to better assist society's most vulnerable. He urged Senegal to lead in condemning human rights abuses in Sudan and Zimbabwe and in opposing the Maputo Plan of Action. END SUMMARY.

THE FOREIGN MINISTRY

2. (SBU) Ambassador Rees met with Mame Baba Cisse, who has just become Director of the Foreign Affairs Ministry's Department for International Organizations after a stint at the U.N. in New York. Rees outlined the objectives that brought him to Africa, including President Bush's wish to bring down infant morality rates, enhance the efficacy of organizations such as UNICEF to which the U.S. contributes heavily, combat violence against women and especially rape, encourage African justice systems to be sensitive to the needs of the vulnerable, expand development to the economically marginal, and bring down the percentage of international organizations' budgets that goes for conferences and consultancy fees so that more donor funding can go directly to those in need.

3. (SBU) Ambassador Rees raised key African issues:

-- He emphasized the deplorable humanitarian situation in Darfur and urged Senegal to lead in persuading the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to take a strong stand in response to Khartoum's refusal to allow an UNHRC inspection team into Darfur. While recognizing that African Union (AU) and Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) states usually take a common position, he appealed to Senegal's sense of constructive diplomacy to break free from the mold and take a stand against a brutal regime. A "no action motion," he emphasized, is the exact opposite of what the U.S. sought on this issue.

-- On Zimbabwe, Ambassador Rees condemned attacks on members of the country's opposition party and pushed Senegal to lead the UN Human Rights Council to speak out more forcefully against Mugabe's rights abuses.

-- Ambassador Rees voiced U.S. concerns that the Maputo Plan of Action requires countries to integrate all HIV/AIDS programs with family planning/reproductive health programs, an integration that would likely divert badly needed HIV/AIDS fund to family planning, and also seemed designed to require African countries to make abortion more widely available. He reminded Cisse that the Plan contained indicators with which national health plans would be expected to comply if the Plan of Action were adopted.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

14. (SBU) On March 15, Ambassador Rees met at the Ministry of Health with Secretary General Moussa MBaye; Technical Advisor for Reproductive Health Dr. Aboubacry Sy (who had attended the Maputo Conference); AIDS Division Chief Dr. Abdoulaye Wade; and MBaye Sene, the Ministry's focal point for mutual health organizations. The thrust of Ambassador Rees' message was U.S. concerns about the Maputo Plan of Action, and U.S. expectations about the role and effectiveness of multilateral organizations working in health. He explained that the Maputo Plan of Action contained six indicators that would effectively include abortion services as a mandatory component of reproductive health; an inclusion that the U.S. believes is inconsistent with the international consensus on reproductive health.

15. (SBU) Health Ministry officials made clear Senegal has no plans to legalize abortion. They affirmed that, as Senegal prepares for the upcoming Johannesburg conference of African Union Ministers of Health, they will consider very carefully all details, indicators and exact language in the document. They did not promise that Senegal would not agree to the document, but they indicated strong agreement with U.S. concerns. In terms of HIV/AIDS and family planning, there was a sense that integration should be encouraged where it works and makes sense, but that governments should not be forced to integrate in cases where it might dilute or divert funds from one focus to another.

16. (SBU) During a 30-minute meeting with Minister of Health Abdou Fall on March 21, Ambassador Rees stressed that the Maputo Plan of action was not a consensus document, could create "an abortion industry in waiting," implied that many African countries need to change their legislative frameworks as related to abortion, and required the integration of HIV/AIDS with family planning programs,

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which is not always a good idea. The Minister responded that these are major health issues, especially in a country like Senegal, where the U.S. is a major strategic partner. Fall noted national differences, highlighting that different African countries have very different HIV/AIDS infection rates and that abortion is a bigger issue in countries where rape has been used as an instrument of war.

Fall said the GOS believed that abortion should only be legal in extreme cases. Citing legislation outlawing female genital mutilation, Fall said that laws should either encourage change or aid societies in adapting to change.

A WOMAN'S VIEW OF SENEGALESE ISLAM

17. (SBU) Ambassador Rees had coffee with Penda MBow, former Georgetown researcher and lecturer at Michigan, who has just been hired to teach at Columbia. MBow runs a modestly funded but successful NGO (the "Citizen Movement"), is an expert on Islam and especially on the Sufi Tidjane Brotherhood, and is outspokenly critical of what she sees as Islam's shortcomings in providing social protections.

18. (SBU) MBow said she had been chastised and, in the early 1990's, beaten for her demands that Senegalese Islam reflect women's needs and contributions to society and Islam. Sufi Islam is tolerant and flexible, but its openness has not extended to women. Moreover, Senegal's marabouts and other religious leaders have resisted her calls for more attention to women's legal rights. As a target of religious conservatives, she knew she had to live a life of exemplary rectitude, and therefore "controlled" her lifestyle. Fortunately, she said, her work was paying dividends: Marabouts who censured her a decade ago now recognize the benefits of her social activism.

19. (SBU) Both agreed international organizations must be made even more efficient in lowering infant mortality and protecting rights of women and children. Islam shares with other major religions an emphasis on welfare of the neediest, but Senegalese Islam could do more.

SENEGAL'S ISLAMIC INSTITUTE

¶10. (SBU) Ambassador Rees engaged Islamic Institute Director Ibrahime Badiane on the responsibility for the protection of society's vulnerable that is inherent in religious faith. The Institute is financed in part by the Senegalese Government but is largely independent. While Badiane told Ambassador Rees that he monitors mosque sermons and calls imams if he hears they have preached something disturbing, he has no authority to sanction or dictate sermon content.

¶11. (SBU) Ambassador Rees and Badiane agreed that religious leaders share a responsibility for identifying and trying to rectify society's shortcomings. High rates of infant mortality and violence against women, Badiane said, were simply unacceptable in a country like Senegal which, by African standards, had relatively high literacy rates, working communications systems, a commitment to democracy and, especially, a religious presence, mainly Muslim but also Christian, throughout the country.

LUNCH WITH THE WORLD BANK AND UNICEF

¶12. (SBU) Over lunch, UNICEF Resident Representative Ian Hopwood and Demba Balde, World Bank specialist in social development, described their priorities. Ambassador Rees took advantage of this very amiable meeting to press for greater efficiency and results in the fight against infant and maternal mortality. All agreed that Senegal and the rest of West Africa have a special responsibility to curb abuse of the tradition of sending very young religious students onto the streets to beg. This had once been a valid religious practice, but now is often simply an avenue of exploitation in cities like Dakar. Ambassador Rees urged with special emphasis U.S. support for UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman's efforts to raise UNICEF's productivity to a level commensurate with funding it receives from the U.S. and other major donors.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF DAKAR

¶13. (SBU) Archbishop of Dakar Adrien Sarr received Ambassador Rees at his home and seemed first surprised and then extremely pleased that President Bush and Secretary Rice had established the new diplomatic post for social affairs. The Archbishop indicated that marital fidelity and abstinence were not prominent enough in African anti-HIV/AIDS plans. The Church, he said, had established what he estimated to be about four percent of Senegal's health facilities, roughly comparable to the Catholic percentage of the population. The Archbishop stressed that the Church is ready to work with the U.S. to lower infant and maternal mortality in a way that respects the right to life and maternal dignity.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND HEALTH RESEARCH

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¶14. (SBU) World Health Organization Country Representative Dr. Antonio Pedro Felipe gave a rundown of strategic and action plans for child health they intend to implement with the Senegalese Government. Rees commented that such plans were worthwhile but not always fully implemented or fully successful in practice, Felipe's staff outlined how plans had been or would be carried out on the ground.

¶15. (U) In a brief morning coffee, Professor Souleymane MBoup, the researcher who identified the HIV2 virus and the head of the bacteriology virology laboratories at the university's Aristide Le Dantec teaching hospital, explained some reasons why Senegal's HIV/AIDS rate was low, including Islam's positive restraining influence.

RADDHO

¶16. (SBU) Alioune Tine of the RADDHO human rights group had returned recently from Sudan, called the situation in Darfur genocide, and added that President Wade was the first African leader to call it that. Tine said Wade was between a rock and hard place as he will be hosting the next Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit and most Arab states support Sudanese

President Bashir. Tine mused that some in the African Union resist U.S. efforts in Darfur to reflect their opposition to the U.S. presence in Iraq, adding that the African Union's "labor union mentality" and Libyan dominance are hindrances to real action on Darfur. He asked the U.S. to intensify lobbying on Darfur among Africans in the U.N. Security Council.

¶17. (U) Ambassador Rees has cleared this cable.

¶18. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's SIPRNET website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.

JACOBS